

THE BLIND HAVE FUN, TOO

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AMERICAN FOUNDATION
FOR THE BLIND INC.

Other students think that social work preparation will enable them to develop strong, healthy personalities. Their wish to enter social work may mirror a basic inadequacy in the personal makeup of

work as a profession has his "reasons." To him at least, they are good reasons, compounded out of what he is as a person, and what he thinks he knows about social work and social science. Although the

which many of the factors listed above are not involved. It is the task of the counselor to help the student re-interpret his interest and his judgments in the light of social work's vocational realities.

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UNFORTUNATELY, the rocking chair has too long been a symbol of old age. We should not toss our old people upon the scrap heap when they reach the twilight of their life. Particularly we should not do that when aged people have the additional handicap of failing sight, or blindness.

Institutional managers, in recent years, have had increasing opportunity to develop methods of making more satisfying the closing years of the aged blind. For a number of years, institutional care has been more and more necessary for them. Modern city apartments are small; children have neither the time nor inclination to give adequate attention to their parents; the war has compelled many women to become the wage earners.

When added to the fact of blindness, this necessity to be separated from their family often strikes the aged blind persons as a last cruel blow of fate. One of the main tasks of the institution is to overcome this feeling. There must be effective orientation before admission, and an effectively administered program of activities. No one program will satisfy all people, but given a varied and flexible plan, most of the inmates will find something suited to their tastes. Occupational therapy, opportunities to read and listen to the radio, encouragement of friendly visiting by relatives and neighbors, all should be a part of any well-managed institutional program.

Group Work Experiment

About two years ago, however, the Yonkers Home for the N. Y. Guild felt that it should go further than this and experiment with a more varied program of group work for some of its aged people, in addition to occupational therapy and other activities.

At that time, the Home had a children's department, now discontinued. The staff helped the children form a club to provide entertainment for the aged residents and, incidentally, for themselves as well. The club celebrated the birthdays of the residents and successfully ran a number of entertainments and parties. After the

children left, the club was taken over by the adults who, of course, elect their own officers and conduct their own meetings.

At their gatherings and socials, the men and women residents meet in an informal atmosphere. They take special pains to look their best, which is all to the good, for they seem imbued with more zest and *joie de vivre*. The club and its activities provide release from the inevitable dullness of routine communal living. It not only gives the members of the home an opportunity to become better acquainted, but provides valuable lessons in group living.

Membership is open to all residents whose ages range from thirty to ninety-six. Dues of ten cents a month defray the expenses of socials as well as contributions to the Red Cross and other national and overseas relief agencies. Sales of war bonds and stamps have been conducted.

The club plans and arranges parties for religious and secular occasions, including refreshments served by partially sighted members. Committee members and club officials appear to thrive on their newly gained responsibilities.

Not the least significant function of the club is the opportunity it affords to the members to express their opinions about the policies and practices of the administration. No effort is made to dominate the club, but if it requests counsel or assistance, it is cheerfully given.

Another activity consists of two discussion groups: one for the Yiddish speaking residents and another for those who are more at home with English. Topics in both groups range from the Bible to contemporary social problems. It is still a stirring experience to witness the keen interest and enthusiasm which the participants display. Frequently, under the heat of controversy, some over-zealous member has to be curbed and reminded that comments must be impersonal. Discussions of topics treated often continue in small groups long after the meeting has ended. One by-product of these sessions is that formerly timid folk have learned to speak on their feet. Others have been encouraged to delve further on topics discussed,

in Braille or through the use of talking books. Still others have been prompted to listen to the Town Hall of the Air and other similar forums.

Dramatics, Too

Dramatics, too, while no novelty among younger sightless folk, have been adapted effectively for the aged blind. Skits, songs, and minstrel type of shows are readily shaped into a creative dramatics program. Participants and audience enjoy these home grown products immensely. Glee clubs, as well as old-fashioned "sings" find a welcome response. In the summer the welkin rings with the mixed voices of grandfathers and grandmothers who are comfortably seated in a shady spot.

Another successful experiment was the launching of a monthly magazine. It required some time and persuasion to overcome the prophets of doom who argued that this couldn't work. Ultimately, reporters were assigned to cover the news in the men's and women's departments. News stories are dictated to the reporters who transcribe in Braille or on the typewriter. Contributions of any sort are welcomed: poems, articles, stories, humor, puzzles, and so on. Some of the written autobiographical experiences have been extremely interesting, since many of our residents have lived in various parts of the world. The magazine is read to the residents at their meetings. Copies are usually sent, upon request of authors, to their children or other kinsmen.

It is a first principle in the treatment of any group of maladjusted people that they must be given the opportunity of developing and maintaining their feelings of self-esteem. On the one hand, there is danger that institutionalized living may obliterate the personality of the individual. On the other hand, a well-managed institution can help bring it into full flower. All who enter a home for the aged blind should be guided into forms of activity in harmony with their interests and capacities. Some will be resistive to any such aid, but others will find new interests and new hope which will invest their last days with more beauty and purpose.

WHAT does the present generation of college students think of social work? Are many of them interested in it as a professional career? If so, why? How much do they know about the opportunities social work has to offer?

Interesting answers to such questions as these have been one result of a new counseling service at Brooklyn College, one of New York City's large city-maintained educational institutions. Set up last fall to "provide students interested in careers in the social service with an opportunity of securing advice," the college's office of pre-social work has given consultation to about thirty students a week who were thinking of social work as a professional career.

At the outset, the counselor tries to learn why the student has become interested in social work rather than some other profession or vocation. Surprisingly enough, the reasons, while varying with the individual students, nevertheless fall into a recurring pattern. While it would be difficult to weigh the responses in sequence or order of importance, taken together, the reasons most commonly expressed give a composite picture of attitudes, information, and misinformation that should be of interest to leaders of a profession in which there is an obvious and substantial undergraduate interest. They could be grouped as follows:

Expressing Liberalism

Liberalism and social work are subject and predicate to some students. They think of social work as being a "liberal" profession, and have more trust in its social techniques than in political devices for effecting social change.

Offset to Physical Science

Many students are aware of the social problems which have followed in the wake of the rapid development of the physical sciences. They say: "Science is all right, but . . . it has complicated our social world." "Technology has outstripped morality." "We have the means to live, but cannot find the opportunity." "Our hope for the future lies in the development of the social sciences."

These students often seem to believe that social work offers an opportunity to contribute to the "science of living." They are attracted by its efforts to alleviate personal, group, and community problems.

But generally, they want to know what efforts social workers are making to bring about social reform. They are apt to be critical of social work for not engaging more vigorously in social action.

Sense of Responsibility

Some students, because they have not entered the armed services, are conscious of owing a debt to society, to their friends, to themselves. Most of them, however, do not feel guilty about this obligation, and express their concern in healthy, vital terms. They consider themselves privileged for having the opportunity to attend college in a war period, and they would like to enter some field where they could use their advantages for the benefit of those who were not so fortunate.

Interest in People

Other students are naturally drawn to persons with problems. They speak of a "native curiosity" about personal problems, and believe that this is fundamental to any desire to be a social worker. Usually these students cannot "rationally" explain this interest, but accept it for what they think it is—"natural."

Professional Status

More than a few students are concerned with achieving a social status that is missing in their background. They see in social work an occupation which elevates the practitioner to a level with physicians, lawyers, ministers, teachers. For one reason or another, they cannot or do not wish to enter one of these professions. Social work appeals to them because it carries the status of a profession, because its training program is relatively brief, and because the initial hardships are not so severe as in other professions. These students usually are not content with the B.A. degree, but wish to obtain a graduate degree so that they will be among the "élite" of the profession.

Job Opportunities

Again, students are preparing for a career in social work for the very practical reason that they believe there are many available positions open for trained workers. In the need for rehabilitating returning members of the armed forces, in the disruptions brought about through moving populations, in the changing status of the family due to war experiences, they see

evidence that social workers needed in even greater numbers. A few of the students interviewed that they wished to enter social work because, "if there is a depression, social work will be one of the few occupations that will not suffer, but may even

Personal Experience

A scant number of students have had practical experience "on the ground" of social work. They have had private difficulty which has led them to call upon the services of social workers. In turn, they have felt that they like to help people in a similar

Vocational Tests

The college offers opportunities for vocational testing, using most commonly the Strong-Stanford test of vocational interest, although other tests have been successfully employed. While the findings of these tests are never used by the college as conclusive proof of any vocational preference, they sometimes aid in clearing up the mind of the student under consideration. A few students have expressed a preference for social work on the basis of tests administered outside the college: private vocational guidance agencies, federal employment service, and other agencies.

Direct Advice

Some students have been told that they would make suitable social workers by relatives who are social workers, by instructors in the college, by friends, by vocational counselors, either within the college or without. Leaders of activities among the students at one time or another have been engaged, such as club work, sports, singing, counseling, have urged them to enter social work as a career.

Last Resort

Often students say that they would like to enter social work because they have tried to work out a "major" in the natural sciences or in the arts without promise of success. They turn, then, to the social sciences and social work as a last resort.

Personal Development

A few students admit that they are looking forward to being professionally employed all their lives. Women

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